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## 19 Between idealisation and stigmatisation

### Analytical dimensions of the media image

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Most content analysis studies of media images, sometimes labeled as representations or portrayals, take the images to be reconstructed as of a merely empirical nature. A conceptual vision on the Media Image as such is problematic because what counts as the content of media messages is open, and does not allow a simple reconstruction of empirical patterns. In this chapter we initiate a framework for media imagery research by discussing the central notion of Media Image as a concept related to the identity family. First we present Hijmans' Dynamic Identity Model that elaborates the analytical dimensions of the concepts of personal and social identity. Next we discuss examples of empirically reconstructed media images from a study of the portrayal of the Dutch and the Germans in news reports. Finally we formulate analytical dimensions relevant for content analysis studies on media images.

### 19.1 Introduction

The impact of media has many faces. One of these is the contribution of media to processes of public imagery e.g. mediated images of groups or social categories. Research into media images is generally under-theorised. In most studies, the media images (also labeled media representations or portrayals) to be reconstructed are taken to be of a merely and solely empirical nature. As a consequence, the two major research traditions in this field are concerned with either counting characteristics derived from predefined stereotypes (for instance Lubbers, Scheepers & Wester, 1998), or with the interpretative reconstruction of patterns of meaning in a text (for instance Wester, Pleijter & Renckstorf, 2004). Both approaches lack a perspective on the basic theoretical characteristics of the concept Media Image that allows for a definition of such patterns in terms of an image.

The absence of a conceptual vision on the Media Image is problematic because of what counts as the content of media messages is, in itself, problematic and dependent on a variety of contexts related to the message (Wester, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004). In general terms, media content is produced in a particular institutional context (for instance a newsroom) and refers to a broad social-cultural context (for instance the Netherlands in 1997). However, during analysis the media text is read from a different context, the research question, for instance the imagery pertaining to the Germans and Dutch (see

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Wester, Pleijter & Renckstorf, 2004). In other readings, other contexts are used. As a consequence, media messages are considered to be of a principally open nature, which does not allow a simple reconstruction of empirical patterns, because part of the empirical content is latent in the text. Thus media content has to be specified beforehand by elaborating the framework and logic of a content analytic study (Krippendorff, 1980). Part of the framework for media imagery research is the elaboration of the Media Image as an analytical concept in terms of the context of the study that allows the researcher to validate empirical reconstructions to be assessed in the study.

In this chapter it is our aim to initiate such a framework for media imagery research by considering the central notion of the Media Image (media representation, or media portrayal) as a concept that belongs to the Identity family. In recent decades there have been numerous descriptions and definitions of the concept of Identity. The simplest of these is still that of Zijderveld. He described identity as everything that answers the questions “Who am I?” “Who are we?”, and “Who are they?” (1987, p. 112).

In this vein Media Images can be considered as attributed identities that, we contend, have the same basic structure as described in the Dynamic Identity Model for personal and social identity (Hijmans, 2003). In what follows we will consider the consequences of this contention for the concept of Media Image. First we will present the Dynamic Identity Model and its basic structure, then we will discuss examples of media images from a research project on the portrayal of the Dutch and Germans in news reports of German and Dutch regional newspapers. Next, we will discuss the consequences of the Dynamic Identity Model for the media image concept. Finally we will formulate our conclusions in terms of the analytical dimensions to be used in content analytic studies of media images.

## 19.2 The Dynamic Identity Model

The historian Frijhoff stated that identity stands at the cross-roads of the psychological and the social (1993, p. 17). Identity is the link between the personal or psychological and the social or cultural. The Dynamic Identity Model is a synthesis of approaches to identity that offers the opportunity to examine these cross-roads. That can be done in two ways: firstly two levels of identity are distinguished—an individual-personal level at which the experiences and definitions of the individual have a place, and a collective-social level at which identity is expressed in group definitions and group behaviour. Both levels can be examined separately and in relation to each other. In the latter case it concerns both the social nature of personal identity and the psychological aspects of social identity. The link between the psychological and the social, for example, could offer an explanation for the affective power of such abstractions as national or ethnic identity. Precisely these links and their embedding in the interaction processes can explain the complexity of such phenomena.

Secondly, the link between the psychological and the social is apparent as two poles in the process of identity construction. One is apparent as an inward-looking, reflexive process and the other as a more outward-looking, interactive process because identity results from interactions with others. In the model the two approaches are complementary—the historical-continuous approach that emphasises structure as the preservation of unity and sameness, and the relational-interactional approach that emphasises process and the notion of difference. The central idea that expresses the complexity of identity is

Basic Dimension	Level	Personal Identity	Social Identity
Sameness affective – historical		Continuity <i>biography</i>	Conformity <i>tradition</i>
Difference relational – interactional		Uniqueness <i>character, authenticity</i>	Distinction <i>inclusion / exclusion</i>

Figure 19.1 Dynamic Identity Model: Basic dimension and levels (Hijmans, 2003, p. 118)

the co-presence of *continuity* (or similarity) and *differentiation* from others (Perinbanayagam, 2000, p. 87). At both levels of identity the same processes are at work, as De Swaan says: social identification has much in common with the psychogenetic process that is called ‘identification’ in psychoanalysis (1994, p. 7).

To summarise, the three points of departure of the identity model agree with the symbolic interactionist standpoint that everyone has multiple, situation-dependent identities. One can define oneself as an individual person and as a member of several associations. A second point of departure is that identity is a symbolic structure, based on the human capacity for reflection, language and culture, in which the construction of meaning in interaction with others is of central importance. The personal self is therefore always a socially and morally responsible self (Lock, 1981; Greenwood, 1994). A final point of departure deals with the dynamic process of identity construction. Identity is the product and expression of relationships with others in which the psychological and the social are interwoven. The dynamic concerns the non-static character of identity, the situational flexibility, and the mutual involvement of the levels of identity in the game of comparison, of sameness and difference. The general idea is that individuals, as members of several groups, must unite the different emotional appeals of these groups in a ‘story of one’s own’, in a narrative of self (c.f. Giddens, 1991).

The model as presented in Figure 19.1 has a primarily heuristic value, and offers a view of the tension between personal and social identity or, more conceptually, the dialectic relationship between individual and society. The model shows that individuals sometimes speak as a person, and at other times speak as a member of a group, and besides it describes the kind of tension that might be expressed. This is essentially different from explaining group behaviour by purely psychological needs, such as the social identity theory of Tajfel (1981), or the desire to differentiate oneself as in Bourdieu’s distinction theory (1979).

In this schematic presentation, we see first of all that in both levels of identity processes of sameness and difference are at play, by which we can understand identity construction at various levels. On a personal level the processes are typified as ‘continuity’ and ‘uniqueness’, and on the social level as ‘conformity’ and ‘distinction’. Given in italics are the concretisations of these processes as manifestations of identity, such as bio-

graphy and tradition. The dynamic of the continuous change cannot be made visible in the model, but the grey lines indicate the possibilities of exchange between levels and dimensions, whereby it must be emphasised that we are dealing with continuums and not discrete units. Before elaborating on the cells, the central approaches of the figure will be explicated as the nucleus of identity construction.

### 19.2.1 The basic dimension of identity: sameness and difference

Together, sameness and difference form the nucleus of the process of identity construction. They demonstrate the fact that identity is an expression of connection and relationships with others. As symbolic interactionists state, there is no self without others: "Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves" (Mead, 1934, p. 164). There are two sides to the coin of connection. On the one hand, emotional involvement with others is a necessary condition for safety and security. By being part of diverse groups and by belonging based on commonality and (elective) affinity, individuals feel at home. From the perspective of identity, group membership offers a social identity, grounded in a sense of belonging, similar ways of thinking and acting. Group members must respect certain limits but also willingly adhere to such limits motivated by emotional commitment (conformity).

On the other hand, involvement in a group also means positioning and setting limits in respect of other groups. The presence of other individuals and groups activates the process that one, as an individual or as a group, is thrown back on oneself as being 'not-the-same'. Contrast brings about distance in a relationship. Identity situates individuals and groups in the world and in relation to each other. Situating and being situated on the basis of common group characteristics, or categorisations, means drawing symbolic boundaries based on differences. These are characteristics that distinguish one's own group in thought and action from other groups (distinction), and the unique characteristics that define an individual and situate one in a group as 'different' (uniqueness). Being unique, or individual, is by definition the expression of a relationship. It is necessary to have one or more others with whom one can compare oneself and in respect of whom one can call oneself 'different'. This kind of relationships stimulates the self-consciousness of individuals and groups as 'different'. In this way difference is not only a relational but also, and primarily, a process of interaction that is 'outwardly' directed towards comparison and contrast with others. Because others and situations are constantly changing, there are multiple aspects of identity, changeable and varying with the situation.

One sees oneself not only in relation to the world and to others, but also to one's self image. Just as connections within a group are necessary to hold the group together, so has the individual to be connected with the self and personal life experiences, with what belongs to the self, transcending the everyday changes of situation. Comparisons then are made not with others, but with oneself over time. Identity is partially the result of past experiences. As Erikson (1959, p. 23) defined, the idea of continuity is primarily a feeling or experience of being the same in time. As an internal process, involvement is primarily an affective experience, a feeling, and at the individual level denotes what conformity and 'common group characteristic' is for the social level, namely the affective-historical aspect of identity construction. A group has a history that transcends individual members of the group, and analogous to that the individual course of life

(biography) transcends particular situations in which the individual takes part as well as the various partial-identities that go with these.

With history, memory plays an important role in identity construction. This concerns the fact that temporality is one of the basic co-ordinates of human experience and existence. A person exists in time, both existentially and culturally, through which identity and meaning are connected to the subjective experience of time (Rappaport, Enrich & Wilson, 1992). This means that every construction of identity is orientated on time, from both a specific cultural-historical background and a view of one's own history. Who one is, is determined, among other things, by past actions for which one is morally responsible and for which one wants the recognition of others (for example, restitution for past injustice), but also those that, unasked, are attributed to someone (stereotyping, labeling). At a personal level, someone without a past and without a life history, such as a foundling or someone suffering from loss of memory, has no real or complete identity, and, in the last case, no future. A group or organisation (e.g., a broadcasting company), that considers the demands of the present day, would like to know at least what is the core that must be retained, considering the continuation of the organisation.

The historical-affective aspect of identity construction includes a comparison over time, with earlier stages of life and earlier experiences. From these comparisons flows the unity and sameness with which one is connected. We shall see that this implies a selective ordering of past incidents. Its primary function is foundation of the present and projection of the future in terms of what is experienced as the heart of a person or group. Belonging to a group, therefore, always has both an affective and a historical aspect. 'Sameness' or 'unity' means an internal, 'inward' directed reflexive process in which the individual or group reaches its own conscious story. In this place in the model, self-consciousness is considered less as thought than as a momentary feeling of being 'other' in relation to continuously changing others, but the 'same' in relation to oneself, with a self-constructed and continuously revised 'narrative of self' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). In particular on the level of personal identity, a somewhat essentialist explanation is still given, but as Strauss (1969, p. 114) emphasised, unity, in the terms of Erikson, is a constructed ego-synthesis, an 'imagined persistence', and just as much is 'difference' the product of subjective meaning attribution.

### 19.2.2 Levels of identity: personal and social identity

So far it has become clear that personal identity results from the processes 'continuity' and 'uniqueness' and for now the reader must accept that these processes, in concrete form, are grounded in the biography and character or authenticity of the individual. The personal identity is a unique constellation of multiple partial identities and because the biography of every individual contains a fitting reconstruction of his or her life, every personal identity is by definition unique.

The same is applicable to a collective group identity. Each group has its own history and distinguishes itself by its own traditions, and on those grounds outsiders are separated from insiders. As De Swaan (1994, p. 6) states: the common denominator also works as a divider. The collective history is internalised and emotionally conducted by group involvement into the personal history.

At the level of social identity the emphasis lies on the working of difference. Concepts such as status, role and lifestyle denote differences in behaviour and values of

public identities. Viewed as interaction, difference results in difference in treatment; stigma is a well-known example of this. More politically orientated researchers, such as those with a background in cultural studies, concentrate mainly on the cultural workings of difference in a context of power (Woodward, 1997; Hall & DuGay, 1996), and the consequences of 'politics of difference' for daily life, particularly for minorities. The working of difference is also clearly a focus in cultural anthropological research (Tennekes, 1992), or research into the lifestyle of (sub)cultures. As Hebdige (1979, p. 102) states: difference is the most important message people want to get across, it is the nuclear concept to which all other concepts are subordinate.

Personal and social identities are connected in many ways, either co-operative or confrontational (Fontana, 1984). In research which does not use our view of connection they are treated as two separate entities. Personal identity is associated with psychological aspects, such as personality, self-image, the true or false self, and the emotions and opinions one has of oneself. In the Dynamic Identity Model psychological aspects emerge as the affective element of the connection to others, either positive or negative, and in the attachment to one's own life story, ideas, and habits. Involvement and distance essentially are emotions that become covered with rationalisations and legitimations for actions, including the judgment and treatment of 'others', with which the transition to the social level of identity becomes a fact.

Summarising, on the personal and social levels of identity both psychological (internal) and social (external) forces are at work. On both levels feelings of attachment and distance play a role, and at both levels one is susceptible to the influence of others. This is apparent in the importance of relations and interactions through which the internal reflexivity of individuals and groups is stimulated, together with the consciousness of being both 'other' and 'the same'. It is clear that identity cannot exist without others, but neither can it exist without individual reflexivity.

This sketch of the dialectical relationship between the personal and the social is not complete without highlighting how individuality finds its way in the social. This is apparent in cultural renewal and change. These refer not in the first place to the artistic, where creative innovation is a sign of quality, but to ordinary everyday life in which individuals, within certain limits, hold their own interpretation of what is socially expected. In terms of the Dynamic Identity Model these processes are shown by the dynamic balance between the cells 'uniqueness' and 'conformity'. Socialisation in common group characteristics, as we shall see, is not total, and the individual is never completely determined by the group. Because each individual is unique the performance of expected behaviour will vary to some extent, and some performances will be followed by others. Furthermore, circumstances tend to change and individuals are sometimes forced to adapt creatively, but usually changes occur slowly and almost unnoticed, and are entitled as 'the spirit of the times', a term that indicates that history cannot be regarded as static.

Because groups tend to preservation, the space for individuality is limited. In western culture individuality is clearly valued but must be balanced against the claims of significant groups. The 'flexible I' (Klaassen, 1993) denotes the position of the modern individual who in daily life regularly experiences a tension between the cells 'uniqueness' and 'conformity' of the Dynamic Identity Model. This tension is the reverse side of the affective bond with others, but for the continuity of a dynamic society this tension

is essential. Therefore we can also speak of a dialectical relationship between personal and social identity: neither can exist without the other.

In the next sections we will specify *sameness* and *difference* at both the personal and social level.

### 19.2.3 Sameness at a personal level: continuity – biography

At a personal level the internal process of self-experience is a form of understanding one's self and primarily an ordering activity. Since life unfolds in time, the ordering (and with it the understanding) of events is framed within the sphere of memory. Starting from there one orientates oneself in the present and anticipates the future. To paraphrase Mead (1932), we can state that in the orientation on the present both the past and future are co-present. Not all past events are important for the present and the future; they are 'selectively relevant' and that is also the case for self-understanding. Identity is rooted in the past and is directed at the future from a continuous re-interpretation in the present. In this sense, identity is a process and always in the state of becoming (Rappaport, et al. 1982, p. 68). The idea of identity as a symbolic construction, which is rarely further explicated in the literature, also means being connected with this intertwining of earlier and present experiences that must continually be forged into a meaningful whole. In other words, identity at a personal level is indeed a synthesis in order to make sense of a continual stream of life experiences. What could be seen as a need for continuity and integration can now be explained as a necessary condition to understand one's self and one's life. An important anchor in this is the comprehensive cognitive structure that brings events and partial-identities, the varying roles and status of the individual to a coherent synthesis (Epstein, 1978; Ewing, 1990; Baumeister, 1995).

This symbolic ordering of life events materialises in the 'biography', the story of their life that individuals tell themselves and others. The biography is a manifestation of identity at a personal level. In the life story the aim of life appears to be unity and continuity, and this is also experienced as such, but in fact it is necessarily a selective ordering, because not all events are relevant in every context. The unity of a life story chiefly lies in 'the eye of the beholder' (Strauss, 1969, p. 147).

Some authors emphasise less the cognitive and more the emotional aspects of identity such as 'self-feeling', a concept derived from Cooley (Erickson, 1995, p. 125), or an intuitive comprehensive feeling of the whole idea of 'being in the world' (Douglas, 1984, p. 96). The latter author attempts to get a conceptual grip on the complexity of self-experience that is both personally and socially determined, and is directed at both the past and future. Self-conscious individuals know where they are, where they were at an earlier moment in time, and where they will be at some moment in the future. Because they also still know what they did and that they did it themselves, they are through this awareness of continuity morally responsible for their actions (Lock, 1981, p. 32). This is one of the ways in which personal identity is linked to the moral order of society.

### 19.2.4 Sameness at the social level: conformity – tradition

At the group level sameness results from the process of 'conformity'. Social identity, 'who we are', is based on an emotional group solidarity that binds the members of the



group to each other and to the past, among other things by myths (of origin). This form of collective memory is, just like personal identity, necessarily selective and the result of meaning attribution. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) employ the concept 'invention of tradition' that is used mainly in the context of nations and local societies. The thought behind it is nevertheless clear and is just as applicable to a primary group such as a family. Traditions, in the form of customs, habits, laws, institutions and so forth, are objectifications of what has crystallised in the passage of time in a society, and what is handed down to the following generations as cultural inheritance. Tradition symbolises the temporal aspect of continuity and the link with the past; it is passed on in the form of stories that explain the past, present and future, the heart of what holds a group together and what it stands for. Besides the way in which the group understands the world, tradition is also externalised in actions and routines or life-styles that distinguish one group from other groups.

The term 'conformity' suggests social control, and to a certain extent that will be the case, for example in the form of specialists who explain and guard the group identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 70), but conformity does not mean determination. Not only is the bond affective, by which coercion is not experienced as such, but accordance with essential points is a necessary condition for the continuation of a group. In Mead's terms, conformity serves the aims of co-operation and adaptive behaviour. Moreover, complete socialisation, in the anthropological sense, is impossible (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 163). One cannot know and experience all of reality, if it is only that individuals are also concerned with their bodily impulses and the inner self-experience. Moreover, one is a member of several groups and takes part in several realities that at various points can be contradictory.

Social identity has many forms—from primary groups to abstract groups such as nations in which there is a bond between people who do not know each other personally on the basis of a common characteristic 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). 'Fellow feeling', taken from Geertz (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 595), or what is often called the 'irrational' bond with such an imagined community and its traditions, is regarded as being at the heart of collective identity. The irrationality is better understood when one realises that the bond with significant others from primary groups one shares membership with, ensures that the common social identity is internalised and thus becomes part of the personal identity. In this way an act of aggression against a nation may be felt as an act against a person, and the victory of a football team may be experienced as a personal triumph.

As explained above, difference and sameness are strongly related on the social level. As a consequence, in the next paragraph we continue to discuss the social level to elaborate on difference, before we switch again to the personal level.

### 19.2.5 Difference at the social level: distinction – inclusion / exclusion

Collective identity, such as national identity, expresses itself in specific meanings and actions (Schlesinger, 1987, p. 259-261). By being recognisable, it is always presented in more or less the same way (tradition), so that the particularity of the group is manifest to both members of the group and to others. Because identity is relational, the presence of others stimulates the solidarity of the group on the one hand, and on the other, the distinction or difference from outsiders. The judgment that takes place when meeting actu-

al others can be typified as a process of inclusion and exclusion. Tennekes (1992, p. 191-192) says that judgment of others is connected to being human. Life is judging things and people and that is easiest on the grounds of one's own values. He mentions also a specific explanation for distinction, namely the human need to distinguish oneself with the help of the cultural differences available; Bourdieu (1979) expresses the same idea in another form. He calls the 'logic of difference' (1979, p. 153) one of the organising principles of our society. Difference is a form of symbolic capital with which one can take a position in respect of others.

A second explanation for the primacy of difference emphasises competition (c.f. De Swaan, 1994). In a certain way the process of division can be called 'logical'. The group with which one is involved demands loyalty and in a situation of competition one cannot be loyal to two groups at the same time. Competition is a broad concept: it concerns both acquiring scarce goods (to survive mentally or physically) and acquiring recognition from others. Depending on the power relationships in a society, this could mean that certain collective identities are excluded from social possibilities in favour of more powerful groups. To be disqualified in this way suggests that identity may be imposed, but may nevertheless become part of the collective self-definition. This means that identity, such as national identity, is not so much an autonomous concept, but rather the product of a dual relationship—one group is included and the other group is excluded (Triandafyllidou, 1998). The favourable results of the presence of ('significant') others for the formulation of collective identity means that it is assumed that others form a threat to the particularity of the group (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 600). This form of competition is usually regarded as contrast or an oppositional relationship and classification into us / them groups (Woodward, 1997) from which stems the self-definition of a group. One knows who one is by knowing who one is not, through an external impulse. It is possible that these contrast relationships are absorbed into the traditional myths about the origin of the group.

#### 19.2.6 Difference at the personal level: uniqueness – character

Difference also plays a role at the personal level. Even though individuals are members of several groups, according to some theorists they have the task, and according to others the need, to distinguish themselves from others. Numerous researchers state with greater or lesser clarity that humans have two needs with respect to identity—the need to be like others and the need to be unique (Tyler, Kramer & John, 1999, p. 4; c.f. Van Baal, 1971, p. 220 on). The need for uniqueness has been more or less equated with having an identity *tout court* (e.g., Klaassen, 1993). In other words, the individual owes his particularity to relationships and interaction, and as explained above, to comparison with others.

No identity without others it is said, but this statement has various levels of meaning. Others provide a mirror in which the individual can view himself and judge himself as he thinks others do. Cooley's 'looking glass self' (1967) is an aspect of identity in which the role of others is expressed in the inner world of the individual. This does not mean that others necessarily exercise a form of social control to allow the individual to be what he is. Precisely the comparison with others, or rather the difference with others, and the apprehension that one is not the other, is a stimulus to the capability of reflexivity. In Mead's terms (1934) it is a typical characteristic of human intelligence that man

can consider himself as both subject and object. Particularly the latter, self-objectivation, is important for uniqueness. It means that people take distance from themselves and can reflect on themselves and their actions. They can free themselves from the stream of impressions and experiences, and regard themselves as an object like other objects. In this key they can adopt the perspective of others (role-taking) to understand others' reactions to their behaviour, but the consciousness of not being the same, of not coinciding with the other is always present. Precisely by experiencing difference, through the resistance that the individual experiences by the reactions of others, self-consciousness is born. The individual comes to realise that characteristics are unique, and that the combination of experiences, reactions, and character, give an authenticity that distinguishes a person from others. Character as a personal mode of behaviour and as a form of legitimation is the task of every individual, according to Klaassen (1993) and Krappmann (1971). In this respect it is important to note that personal characteristics are not a question of choice: one cannot decide to behave in one way one day and in another way the following day. One has to be different and to acquire a position in the group, and in remaining a good partner in interaction, one must be and remain recognisably different. That means that one is both the 'same self' for oneself, and the 'same other' for others, and that is then absorbed in the personal identity as character.

### 19.3 Reconstructed Media Images: Some Characteristics

Research on media portrayals brings us to the conclusion and starting point that media images have more the character of a *social* rather than a *personal* identity. Frequently these studies concern social groups such as children (Alexander, 1994), Arabs (Shaheen, 1994) or immigrants (Lubbers, Scheepers & Wester, 1998). It is possible that the image is that of a person, but in that case it concerns attributed characteristics that are connected with that individual as example of a certain public category, such as a film star or VIP (Deutschman & Ellison, 1999).

When presenting individuals or groups, media texts and pictures use symbols that are both an expression of a relationship, as well as the quality of that relationship in the form of judgments. By using shared, or partially new meanings in representing others or groups, media images mediate the collective way of thought that forms the cultural baggage of a community.

In order to gauge the dimensions of media image construction, we will discuss some examples from a study of 'Dutchness' and 'Germanness' in Dutch newspaper reports (for a description see Wester, Pleijer & Renckstorf, 2004).

News items of events in various social domains (state visits, football matches, and company mergers) with a Dutch-German connection were examined. *Image construction* was identified when news items characterised events or the persons concerned in terms of their German or Dutch backgrounds.

In case of state visits, the actors are (representatives of) the Dutch and German governments. They are presented primarily from the perspective of the political and economic relationships between the countries, in relative terms. Germany is thus portrayed as powerful and big, and The Netherlands as small and dependent.

The most important actors in the coverage of the merger and dissolution of the Fokker-Dasa company are the Dutch government, the German concern Dasa and the Dutch airplane manufacturer Fokker. The perspective is that of a financial-economic question,

but images were constructed on the basis of their German or Dutch backgrounds. The already mentioned unbalanced relationship (big-small, powerful-dependent) returns here.

In the reports of football matches, the chief actors are the German and Dutch national teams and their strategic, technical and motivational powers, in relative terms. They are rivals, sometimes the one team is stronger in one aspect, sometimes the other, but the German team is constantly dominating with respect to the mental aspect.

In all three domains, we find an unbalanced relationship (big-small, powerful-dependent), and we also find this to be countered with mentioning Germany's black past!

When media images emerging from the various cases are compared, it seems, from a Dutch perspective, that the relation with Germany may be characterised as a relationship with a big, strong brother with a tainted past. This double significance concerning Germany is also found in the view on Germans—a land of culture, a great economic power with hard working, thorough people, everything perfectly finished, but arrogant. The views on the Dutch are of a trading nation that produces merchants and savers who are both patronising and libertines, who always keep bringing up the war (see Wester, Pleijter, Renckstorf, 2004).

The question is: are these empirically reconstructed images valid in an analytical sense? To what concepts do they refer, or how can they be understood? To answer these questions, we must further examine the specific characteristics of Media Images by considering this type of research outcomes from the analytical perspective of the Dynamic Identity Model.

## 19.4 Analytical Dimensions of the Sensitising Concept Media Image

The representation of identity to be worked out here in the Media Image Model follows the original Dynamic Identity Model in the sense that media representation is an expression of relationships, positions, and a self-consciousness that is related to the 'sender', but the perspective shifts from the individual speaker of the Dynamic Identity Model to the media content and the other(s) represented in it.

On the individual level, Pickering (2001) mentions in this respect the 'exaggeration of difference' that colours the presentation and judgment on the other and at the same time has the function of maintaining the superiority, conceit, and high opinion of one's own identity. In short, everyone who says something about the other says something about him- or herself and his / her relationship with the other, and what is said about the other also concerns one's own identity. As a consequence the four cells of the Dynamic Identity Model are defined from the perspective of the Self.

This is not the case in the Media Image Model, or only in an abstract sense. Although the media are not by definition consonant in their presentation of individuals and groups, we still speak of a collective media representation because media are the most important mouthpiece for what is going on in a community. When we talk in a general sense of *the* media, we refer to media that function on a societal level, referring to a general culture and public opinion as a context. But some media may function on a local or regional level, or within a specific group or collectivity as community. In that case, the specific group and its worldview are the context for a specific 'We-perspective'. As

a consequence, the four cells of the Media Image Model are to be defined from the We-perspective of the community implicated as speaker in the media text.

Thus, while in the original Dynamic Identity Model the speaker tells something about himself by what he says about others in current times (distinction) or himself in the past (continuity), the Media Image Model is primarily directed at the analysis of *collective* representations of others at the present day, formulated in terms of the community-perspective.

The characteristics of media portrayal noted above make it necessary to extend the diagram of the Dynamic Identity Model in section 19.2, to media representations of attributed collective identities (Media Image Model; see Figure 19.2). With this change of perspective a number of notable differences emerge. In contrast to the characteristic presence of both *sameness* and *difference* in the Dynamic Identity Model which endows the actor with a dynamic identity, the representation of attributed characteristics is the relatively static product of settled *cultural* experiences and generalisations (stereotypes). According to Goffman (1976) advertisements in particular make use of simplified highly ritualised meanings that are immediately obvious. In this way media content manifests the settled collective thought and definition processes as attributed characteristics and judgments on persons and members of groups or collectivities. Typical is that these are to be found in a continuum stretching between *idealisation* and *stigmatisation*: in media images sameness and difference tend to be both exaggerated. This perspective connects us to both the ritualisation of meaning noted by Goffman (*ibid.*), a condensation and simplification of meaning that makes media portrayal easily accessible to a large group of community members. But at the same time it connects us with the character of stereotypes noted by Pickering (2001) in connection with national identity, the subject of the examples in section 19.3.

The representation of the other may concern a single person or, more usually, social groups or categories within the community to which the speaking WE belong, or it also may concern representatives of another community. In the latter case the portrayal of a foreign *national identity* clearly concerns a collective identity that is compared with the collective identity of the WE-community.

To define the dimensions relevant for the study of media images, we first concentrate on the general model of representation of groups or categories, like youngsters,

Level	Identity	Identity	Media Image	Media Image
Basic Dimension	Personal Self	Social Self	Public Identity	Collective Identity
Sameness affective – historical	Continuity <i>biography</i>	Conformity <i>tradition</i>	Individual past <i>heroism</i>	Cultural past <i>values</i>
	I		WE	
Difference relational – interactional	Uniqueness <i>authenticity</i>	Distinction <i>in-/ exclusion</i>	Excellence <i>talent</i>	Distance <i>friends and foes</i>

Figure 19.2 From Dynamic Identity Model to Media Image Model

women, far right or psychiatrists. These representations portray partial identities *within* the community defined from the WE-perspective.

As we have seen in section 19.2, sameness is inwardly directed, reflexive, its temporal orientation is on the past and also contains an affective component that refers to involvement and loyalty. If we translate this into the Media Image Model, sameness is used to define the collectivity's place in the community's history. It refers to its nature and origin as defined through the WE-perspective and the affective relationship the community maintains with the group. Dependent on its specific role in the community's history, it concerns a characterisation as alien or common in terms of the WE-perspective. This often means that an implied comparison group (women – men, immigrants – nationals) is used to produce a balance or counterpart.

With respect to difference it is clear that its temporal orientation is focused on the 'now' and the current experiences of the community. The identity thus represented implies a relative positioning of the comparison parties involved with respect to each other based upon attributed characteristics and judgments, either positive or negative. Ultimately it comes to distance, elaborated in terms of a relative balance of positive and negative characteristics.

Representation of another identity at the collective level follows an exaggerated 'logic of difference', as described in section 19.2, rather than following the 'rules' of everyday life. The process in the background is known as drawing symbolic limits—and in fact creating emotional distance. The greater the emotional distance, the more characteristics that indicate danger, menace, or distrust are deployed. In other words: the represented category is symbolically and emotionally exiled. Complementary to this it follows that the less the emotional distance, the greater the emphasis on similarity and membership.

But, as said, the model also offers the possibility to portray individuals as representative of a group, category or community. In that case it is not the personal identity that is represented but his or her public identity. Individuals are thus not private persons but well-known characters of collective importance who are regarded as public property. Whenever individuals are placed in the spotlight they become *exemplary cases* who played a special role in a collective past (e.g., a naval hero such as De Ruyter, a painter such as Rembrandt) or in the present when their unique gift or talent distinguishes them from the general mass, such as sports(wo)men or artists. In the Media Image Model sameness refers to values of the community that are mirrored in the narrative of the hero's life. We learned from the discussion in section 19.2 that a single *partial* identity dominates the image—the naval hero, the sporting hero, or the Nobel Prize winner who represents all that is best, just as the traitor or rapist represents the very worst.

In the Media Image Model, difference in regard to others emerges by defining the person as exceptional. The portrayed person is different from the others, whether in a positive sense by talent, charisma, or promise or in a negative sense through madness, hysteria or some other deficiency.

National identity is expressed on a personal level by national heroes. The same selective view occurs at a collective level, but then with special *events* that are seen as characteristic for a collective past. This concerns collective memory, partly maintained by the teaching of history and remembrance rituals that express relationship and connection, and tales of events that express success and satisfaction (for the Dutch: East In-

dies Company / VOC mentality, 1988) or trauma and shame (Dutch: WWII, Srebrenica).

But in all these cases the WE-perspective is self-centered. In the representation of a strange national identity in community media the aforementioned processes of sameness and difference with respect to collectivities are used, but now with the own community as a comparison group. Sameness refers to the role of the other nation in the community's history, and the affective relationship the community feels. Difference refers to current experiences of the community with that other nation. The double significance that emerged in section 19.3—Germany as the big strong brother with the tainted past—is now more easily understandable as a *one-sided* Dutch perspective. The brother indicates familiarity, which creates a relative ordering: big and strong point to the acknowledgement of a hierarchical difference, for instance the economic dependence of the Netherlands on its neighbour. The tainted past indicates a stigma, but also a moral responsibility due to a common past. That past plays a considerable role because it is linked to a collective trauma that is kept alive through remembrance rituals. It is hardly imaginable that the German perspective on itself or on the Netherlands will use the same lines of thought, or use the same imagery.

## 19.5 Conclusion

In summary, in this chapter we have illustrated that media portrayals of groups and social categories share the basic structures of social identity construction of persons and groups interacting and living together.

Media representations are cultural vehicles, containing both shared and contested meanings that witness the dynamics of historical self-understanding of a community. In expanding the conceptual elaboration of the dynamic construction of personal and social identity (Dynamic Identity Model) with a focus on media portrayal, we have sensitised that the main characteristics of the Media Image Model can be seen as a negative of the Dynamic Identity Model. The community perspective uses the personal levels as exemplary cases of its values. The exaggeration of sameness and difference is its main rhetorical device (Media Image Model). Media imagery is thus moving somewhere between the polarities of idealisation and stigmatisation, to enhance collective accessibility by deploying stereotypes and categorisations.

We have also discussed the major role of history, both in the processes of identity construction and representation, as well as the emotional quality of the relationship that underlies identification and representation. Emotional distance and involvement is in fact intertwined with the memory of events relevant for the community and its relationship with other groups, categories or communities. This mostly latent role of the community perspective accounts for the complexity of the phenomena of identity construction and representation in media imagery.

This complexity necessitates researchers in the field of mediated social representations to take these characteristics into account in order to reach a deeper understanding of the nature and tenacity of social categorisations. In conclusion we may define four principles for the study of media images. First of all, the analyst has to define the *community perspective* contained in the media text. Next, both *sameness* and *difference* must be used as dimensions for the articulation of characteristics of the portrayed social category or group. These articulations then, refer to *community values* as highlighted in

the community's past or excellent community representatives. These articulations tend, lastly, to be stereotyped by comparing groups as counterparts, which as a consequence, defines their relative *distance* from the cultural core.

The same principles hold for images referring to national identities. This is especially relevant in situations where a text seems to focus only on characterisations of the other nation. On a more latent, underlying level, the narratives of past experiences and present interactions of the home nation, implicated in the media text, form the context that defines these typifications. As a consequence, comparative research of media images in media texts from different countries needs a design that does justice to each different cultural-historical context as a means to understand the intricacies of media images.

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